



**U.S. Department  
of Transportation**

Office of the Secretary  
of Transportation

**GENERAL COUNSEL**

**August 28, 2018**

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Mr. Charles Leocha  
President, Travelers United  
1200 N. Nash St., Suite 554  
Arlington, VA 2209

Dear Mr. Leocha:

Thank you for your recent letter to Secretary Chao regarding the Department's implementation of the family seating provision in the FAA Extension, Safety and Security Act of 2016.

The family seating provision in the FAA Extension Act requires the Department to review U.S. airlines' family seating policies and, "if appropriate," issue a policy directing U.S. airlines to establish policies that enable children under age 13 to sit with an adult at no additional cost in the same class of service. Pursuant to the statute's directive, the Department reviewed U.S. airlines' family seating policies. The Department also reviewed complaints that it received directly from consumers on family seating issues. Based on the information obtained from its review, the Department developed practical tips for families to use to enable them to sit together during air travel. See <https://www.transportation.gov/individuals/aviation-consumer-protection/family-seating>. We believe that providing consumers clear and accurate information enables them to make better informed decisions when choosing among transportation options.

The Department has also established a separate complaint category for family seating complaints so it is easier to track such complaints. We are continuing to monitor and review family seating complaints the Department receives to give us better information on airline policies that are and are not working.

If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Blane Workie  
Assistant General Counsel for  
Office of Aviation Enforcement and Proceedings



*1200 N Nash St., Suite 554, Arlington, VA 22209 Tel. 202-713-9596*

July 25, 2018

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao  
Secretary of Transportation  
US Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

We urge the Department of Transportation (DOT) to enforce the 2016 FAA bill passed by Congress requiring airlines to enable families with children 13 and younger to sit together at no additional charge.

The Department has decided that the law is not necessary and that it can ignore the will of Congress and a duly enacted law written by a bi-partisan set of lawmakers. At the very least, DOT should announce a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) that would allow a full debate about whether families with young children should be seated together on flights.

Your inaction makes DOT a witting accomplice to airlines who hold kids hostage and separate them from their families. The airlines force parents to pay as much as \$200 and more per person to protect their toddlers, young children and pre-teens from sitting next to a stranger. DOT inaction is just unacceptable. Every day the current family policies of many major airlines can harm thousands of American families financially and emotionally.

We know many friends of families genuinely want to look after family rights and protect children. Frankly, we are surprised that you are not among them.

President Trump, Vice President Pence, Karen Pence and Ivanka Trump have been among the loudest voices expressing concern for families and children. Please consult with them as to whether or not they feel that separating families for the convenience and profit of airlines rather than allowing them to be together at no additional cost is the correct course.

Your DOT has decided with no rulemaking, no hearings, and no input considered from advocates for families and consumers, that children do not need protecting in the air. Plus, families have no rights to fly together without paying extra airfares and exorbitant seat reservation fees according to this DOT inaction. Today, your acquiescence to the airlines must end. Your primary responsibility is to the public interest, not corporate desires.

The instruction in the 2016 FAA bill is precisely the kind of family issue that needs a full hearing as a proposed rulemaking. The President and Vice-President will applaud your fight for America's families.

The Congress has already spoken. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain by moving forward with opening rulemaking comments to the public and other stakeholders about the need for this kind of regulation.

Secretary Chao, start rulemaking procedures to allow families to sit together without penalties or DOT will be complicit in every incident on airlines in which children are abused or traumatized by sitting next to strangers. I am confident that is not your intent.

We stand with America's families and children. Congress holds with families. Secretary Chao, on which side do you and DOT stand – with airlines gouging families for extra fees or with America's families?

It is time for DOT to focus on the public interest rather than only the airlines' the airline focus on the bottom line.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles Leocha", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Charles Leocha  
President, Travelers United



## Family Seating

The Department recognizes the importance that families place on sitting together when flying. To make sitting together easier when flying within the United States, the Department offers the following practical tips that families may use before, during, and after air travel.

### Before and During Booking

**Understand your airline's seating policies.**

- You can obtain information about an airline's family seating policies directly from the airline. This information may be available on an airline's website. If you cannot find this information on an airline's website, you may also contact the airline through its reservations to request this information.
- Many airlines allow consumers to reserve seats next to each other without paying an additional fee.
- If you are interested in sitting next to members of your family, make sure the ticket that you are purchasing allows you to reserve specific seats on your flight.
  - For example, basic economy class tickets are often lower priced tickets that may not provide consumers with the ability to select a seat. These tickets may not meet the

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needs of families with young children.

- All airlines may allow a child under two years old to be held on a person's lap during the flight. Please contact your specific airline for more information on its policy as the required age of the person holding the child varies by airline.
  - The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) encourages all passengers traveling with children under two years of age to use a government-approved child safety restraint system or device. For more information, please visit the FAA's [Flying with Children](#) page.
- [FAA regulations](#) prohibit children under 15 and passengers caring for small children from sitting in exit row seats. Please contact your specific airline for more information on its exit row policy.

### **Book your ticket as early as possible and reserve seats together.**

- The earlier you book your family's travel, the more likely it is that you will be able to reserve seats that are next to each other.
- If you tried to book your tickets early, and seats are not available together, contact the airline through reservations to ask whether additional seats will become available later.

### **Book children on the same reservation as adults.**

- Airlines generally know travelers belong to one party only if all the passengers are on the same reservation record.
- Airlines assigning or reassigning seats give priority to parents and children on the same reservation.

## **After Booking**

**Contact the airline directly through reservations if your family was not able to obtain seats together or if you are unsure about the status of your seats.**

- Ask the airline how it may be able to accommodate your family in advance of your flight or at the airport.
- Discuss with the airline your concerns about a child being seated alone. Even if the airline is unable to seat the whole family together, they may be able to assure you that each child is seated next to an adult family member.

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- If you booked parents and children on different reservations, contact the airline as soon as possible to ask if the party can be put on the same reservation record or have their reservations cross-referenced in the booking notes.

### **Confirm reservations that are not booked with the airline.**

- If you did not book your travel directly with an airline, obtain or confirm your seat assignments directly with the airline as soon as possible before the day of travel. This can be done either on the airline's website or over the phone by contacting reservations.

### **Arrive at the airport early on the day of your flight.**

- Airlines will do what they can at the airport to help families who self-identify to their agents as needing to sit together. Even if the airline is unable to seat the whole family together, they may be able to assure you that each child is seated next to an adult family member.
- Arriving early will give the airline's agents more time to help your family.

## **After Travel**

### **Share your experience with the airline and DOT.**

- If you should have a problem during your trip, you may [file a complaint](#) with the airline or DOT.
- The feedback you provide to the airline may influence the way an airline interacts with families traveling together. The feedback you provide the Department will better inform us on what is and is not working.
- Whether you have a positive or negative traveling experience with the airline, the information that you provide can help improve the future traveling experiences of families with young children.

## **Information for Families Available on Airline Websites**

- [Alaska Airlines](#)
- [American Airlines](#)
- [Delta Air Lines](#)

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- [Frontier Airlines](#)
- [Hawaiian Airlines](#)
- [JetBlue Airways](#)
- [Southwest Airlines](#)
- [United Airlines](#)

Updated: Thursday, July 19, 2018



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*Related Links*

- [Press Release: DOT Relaunches Air Consumer Website](#)

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